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Waging war with Scientology

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Times staff

Lawyer Michael Flynn of Boxford says the Church of Scientology is a front for a fascist organization. Scientologists claim he is an opportunist and a fortune hunter.

Flynn, who practices in Boston, and church officials have been sparring in courthouses across the country for the past four years. But the struggle has become a battle of name-calling as well as lawsuits.

"I'm No. 1 on their enemy list," said Flynn, who represents 32 former Scientologists throughout the United States accusing the church of kidnapping, extortion and larceny, among other charges. One of Flynn's clients is the estranged son of the church's founder, who dropped out of sight two years ago.

Flynn said the church is waging a "black campaign" to destroy his career and to frighten him into backing away from the litigation. The Scientologists counter that Flynn is waging a propaganda campaign to discredit the church.

Both Flynn and the church have filed numerous lawsuits in courts thoughout the country. Both sides claim to be winning the battles, if not the war.

In the most recent case last week, the church filed a libel suit against Flynn in U.S. District Court in Boston, accusing him of telling lies to a newspaper reporter in Clearwater, Fla., where he coordinated hearings on the group's activities.

The church is seeking damages in excess of $20,000. But a press release given to the Times by the Church of Scientology of Boston said this is "merely a procedural amount" and that the "actual amount awarded," if the church wins the suit, could be more than 50 times that figure.

Flynn said this is only one of a dozen lawsuits to be filed against him in different cities throughout the country, and one more attempt to besmirch his name. Nine suits, he said, have been dismissed so far.

Michael Flynn: Enemy No. 1

"This suit will be dismissed, too," said Flynn, who is a graduate of Holy Cross College and Suffolk University Law School.

Church officials don't agree.

"Michael Flynn has a habit of making false and outrageous statements concerning the church and is now going to be confronted with them in a court of law," said Roger Geller, attorney for the Scientologists. "Since he is an attorney engaged in massive litigation against Scientology, one would expect Flynn to base his remarks on facts. Instead he has once more indulged in wholesale fabricatons."

Flynn, who has been interviewed by several news shows, magazines and newspapers about the Church of Scientology, doesn't usually consent to an interview every time a libel suit is filed against him.

"This is so close to home that I am taking the time for interviews," said Flynn, 38, from his law office on Union Wharf this week.

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Flynn is about to file his own lawsuit against church founder L. Ron Hubbard to seek damages for a conspiracy he said is being fought against him. He charges that from 1979 to 1981 that conspiracy included bomb and letter threats to his law office, harrassment of his clients and rifling of his trash.

At one time, he feared for his own life and was protected by bodyguards around the clock while he coordinated the hearings in Florida.

"I'm not afraid anymore because my profile is too high," he said. But when asked if he still carried a gun, Flynn pulled a .357 Magnum revolver from his desk drawer.

Flynn claims that Scientology is not a religion but a front for an organization whose goal is to gather large amounts of money and information that can be used against individuals.

Scientology was founded in 1954 by L. Ron Hubbard, a science fiction writer turned religious leader. A member of the Church of Scientology in Boston described Hubbard's philosophy as an organized body of scientific research and knowledge about life and the mind. It includes the practice of improving the intelligence and conduct of persons.

This is done by the use of engrams — mental images or pictures which are memories of physical and emotional pain — during confessions or auditing sessions, said the spokeswoman.

Auditing sessions often make use of an e-meter, described as a "religious artifact" resembling a metal lunch box with a dial and several knobs. Two wires coming out of the box lead to two tin cans which are held in the hands of the confessor. The e-meter helps locate areas of distress, but can only be used by people trained to read them.

Commercials for Hubbard's book, "Dianetics," can still be heard on Boston radio stations and sound like ads for any other self-help book.

Flynn said scientologists work on fear and ignorance and prey on the weak and unstable. The church is actually a front for the largest, private espionage organization in the country whose ultimate goal is to infiltrate the government, he said.

"They are vicious, intimidating, Nazis," said Flynn "It's hard for people to believe, but even this is only the tip of the iceberg."

Flynn believes the church is so pervasive that he said he doesn't bother to obtain an unlisted phone number for his home at 72 High Ridge Road because, "they would know the unlisted number before I did."

Although he has received threats at his office, Flynn said his wife, Laima, and three children have not been threatened.

The church was ordered to turn over any documents they took from Flynn's trash in April 1982, by U. S. District Court Judge James Garrity Jr.

Flynn's battle with the Scientologists started in the summer of 1979 when a young woman from Somerville, LaVenda Van Schaick, came to his office claiming she was a former member of an organization that was infiltrating the government through a private espionage organization.

"I hired a private investigator and found the allegations were true," said Flynn.

It was several months after he filed a suit for Ms Van Schaick, in an effort to recover $12,800 she said she had donated to the church, that nine Scientology officials were convicted of involvement with a plan to infiltrate and enter federal agencies in Washington that were investigating the church. Two more church officials, including Hubbard's third wife, were later convicted and are now in jail.

Documents released publicly by the U.S. Justice Department helped form the basis of Flynn's case for Ms. Van Schaick, which is still pending.

Flynn now confers with 30 other lawyers throughout the country representing Scientology defectors. Some of the 22 lawsuits filed by Flynn have come to court, but he said none have been dismissed and that he has won every major motion thus far.

Of the "black campaign," Flynn said the church has not uncovered any skeletons in his closet.

"In four years they've only found a stop-sign violation," he said.